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ABSTRACT

A participant observation study of a primary grade classroom, in which three first grade students were selected as case study subjects, illustrates the range of workstyles of beginning writers. Primary grade teachers are often concerned that their students are not producing writing comparable with their capabilities, but educators' conceptions of what very young writers should be doing are too narrow, not accounting for children's varied workstyles. The three subjects, a mixed Black/Anglo boy, a Hispanic boy, and a White girl were observed as they wrote and drew pictures in their journals over a year. The first boy relied heavily upon social contact as he drew, "talking" his stories as he drew and then writing about what he had drawn. He worked at a moderate pace and learned to spell a number of frequently repeated words. The second boy, interested in writing "adventure stories," spent much more time producing careful pictures and longer stories that made more narrative sense than the first child's work. The girl produced more stories and pictures than either boy, was careful and neat in her work, but the stories lacked variety, always centering on friends and family. While teachers do need to assess students' workstyles and what they produce, such variety in workstyles suggests that teachers must also be flexible to meet the needs of their students. (Three pages of references are included.) (JC)

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Center for the Study of Writing

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INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN BEGINNING COMPOSING: AN ORCHESTRAL VISION OF LEARNING TO WRITE

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August, 1987

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Carnegie Mellon University

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INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN BEGINNING COMPOSING: AN ORCHESTRAL VISION OF LEARNING TO WRITE

By

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Manuel, a first grader, is sitting at a table with a group of his classmates during writing time. He is having difficulty spelling *in*, and so he asks for help. Naji, a classmate, raises his eyebrows:

Naji: Do you want to spell "on"?

Manuel: No, "in".

Naji: "In"! That's the EASIEST word.

Shamari: That's the EASIEST word.

Manuel: You guys. Don't you think you're overreacting?

Naji: It's the easiest word, when you're going on the third grade.

Manuel: I'm only a first grader.

The exchange between Manuel and his peers raises a critical question: What should be expected of young writers at different points in time? Or, in Manuel's words, what is "overreacting"?

This concern for expected progress is central to the schooling experience. The children's concern in the above interaction reflects the concern of adults--parents, teachers, and administrators--for placing children along some line of growth. This concern for progress is central as well to research in writing development. The guiding question of such research is, "How do children change over time?" The answers to that question inform the vision offered in the instructional literature on young children's "natural" or "typical" writing behaviors (e.g., Gordon, 1984; Walshe, 1982). In this article, I argue that, not only are our current portraits of young writers too uniform, our conception of writing development needs to be expanded out from its current narrow shape. Drawing upon data collected in a participant observation study of primary grade writers, I aim first to illustrate ways in which children's composing behaviors may differ by presenting three case studies of primary grade writers. Second, I aim to contribute to the formulation of a framework for understanding these differences. Such a

framework must highlight the interaction of the written language system, the intentional child who manages or conducts that system, and the supportive context shaping the child's efforts; further, it must depict the growth of the child's conducting, not simply as progression forwards (or even backwards) along a line, as in leading a parade, but as increasingly refined controlling, as in directing an orchestra. Third, I intend to suggest the implications of this framework for teachers' assessment of individual children's competence as writers.

Before presenting the young composers, I next contrast linear and holistic orchestral examinations of writing, arguing that holistic approaches allow for the expected variability in young composers' ways of supporting and managing the complex writing process.

Documenting Writing Growth: The Strands of the System

Learning the written language system involves understanding *encoding* or, in Werner and Kaplan's (1963) terms, the relationship between symbolic vehicle and referent (i.e., the relationship between print and the formal aspects of speech, including phonemic and morphemic information). And it involves as well understanding *message formation*, or the discursive processes through which experience is rendered or transformed so that it may be communicated from the symbol producer to a recipient in varied communicative contexts.

In an effort to understand patterns in writing development, researchers have studied diverse aspects of this complex symbol system. For example, researchers have focused on children's exploration of the visual features of print (Clay, 1975). They have studied how children come to understand the symbolic encoding system (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Read, 1975) and how children master the structural features of stories and other sorts of texts (King & Rentel, 1981). Within any one strand of written language knowledge, general patterns in how children perform in particular sorts of writing tasks can be identified.

Thus, when examining children's work, teachers may look for expected changes over time in children's use of visual space (e.g., Graves, 1983), their independent spelling (e.g., Henderson, 1981), their structuring of text (e.g., Temple, Nathan, & Burris, 1982), or even their organizing of meaningful units of ideas (McCaig, 1981).

While such procedures for documenting progress are sensible and clearly helpful, there is reason for caution when looking for "the expected"--"the natural"--in any one child's writing performance. For there is a difference between a general pattern of development in a particular strand of writing knowledge (as revealed by a particular task) and the actual activity of orchestrating that knowledge to compose a message, encoded in letter graphics, for a particular purpose (Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel, & Klausner, 1985).

Orchestration: How Children Learn to Write

As in learning any system, children must search for order--the interrelated structures of parts (e.g., letters, words, sentences, texts) and the rules governing the arrangement of those parts in varied contexts. Children's ways of learning this system

do appear to follow broad develomental patterns. Initially, children may engage in exploratory play with the visual medium of written language, with no concern for a specific message at all; they may also participate in and play with the social functions of written language, as in making "shopping lists" or writing entertaining stories, with little concern for the precise encoding of messages (Dyson, 1983). In these early efforts, children may be on the outside of the symbol system; that is, they may not understand its inner workings--the fact that visual symbols are related in arbitrary but precise ways to formal characteristics of speech which are in turn related to the specific message received by a reader (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982).

Once children gain some initial understanding of the unique nature of the symbol system, including its relationship to oral language, writing may become more difficult. Children may be less willing to randomly put down well-known letters, or to simply trust that a reader will find a message in their printed graphics (Clay, 1975). They must work hard to orchestrate the complex message creating and encoding process of writing.

As most recently discussed by Weaver (1982) and Jacobs (1985), children may initially simplify writing tasks by focusing upon certain aspects of the system rather than others. However, to understand systematic variation in children's efforts at orchestrating writing, we have to include in our theoretical framework not only the complexity of language learning (Weaver, 1982; Jacobs, 1985) but the complexity of the individual child using that language in a real time situation (Dyson, 1985; Gourley, Benedict, Gundersheim, & McClellan, 1983). For children's ways of managing literacy tasks depend upon their overriding intentions, their work style, and the support system within which their writing takes shape.

Sources of support

Children can lean or draw upon different sources of support in learning to write beyond their knowledge of the varied aspects of written language; these sources include other symbolic tools, other people, and familiar activities within which to engage both tools and people. The richest discussion of these support sources is found in the theoretical work of Vygotsky (1978). He viewed writing as a tool that has its roots in earlier developed forms of symbolizing--gesture, speech, dramatic play, and drawing. Children, then, may lean for support on these other symbolic tools in learning to write. At the same time, because children, for both personal and social reasons, have different ways of using symbolic materials (Wolf & Gardner, 1979; Nelson, 1985; Peters, 1977), these tools (e.g., speech, drawing) provide children with different resources--different transitions--to written language (Dyson, 1986).

Vygotsky argued that, to develop the cultural tool of written language, children must be socialized into the intellectual life of their community through interaction with others. Thus, social interaction is another major source of support in the development of written language.

Finally, the notion of writing as a cultural tool used in social activities implies that those activities will also support or shape young writers' efforts (Dyson, 1984; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Heath, 1983). The shaping, supportive components of an activity include not only the materials and the participants available, but also the purpose governing the activity, the rules governing the sequencing of phases or steps in the activity, and the expectations of the participants.

The support system for any individual child's writing permeates settings. That is, different communities (Heath, 1983), families (Taylor, 1983), and classrooms (Clark & Florio, 1982) engage children in different literacy activities, involving different symbolic and social sources of support. In this article, the focus is on the social and symbolic support system immediately available to the observed young writers within one classroom as they engaged in the composing process itself.

Style and intention

Children's ways of leaning upon available sources of support and, simultaneously, of beginning to manage writing will depend upon their individual styles or ways of functioning. Individual differences in ways of initially using a symbol system have been noted in many areas of development, including speech, symbolic play, and drawing (e.g., Nelson, 1985; Peters, 1977; Wolf & Gardner, 1979). Nelson (1985), referring specifically to oral language development, attributes these differences in part to differences in children's conceptions of what the language system is used for (the functions or intentions it serves).

Differences in children's ways of using symbol systems have generally been described as differences in tendencies to concentrate on *accurately representing patterns* in the physical world (i.e., concentrating on the relationship between symbolic vehicle and referent) or on *capturing the social dimensions of situations*, including the communication of messages (i.e., concentrating on the relationship between symbol producer and recipient). Because of these stylistic differences, children may focus on and develop different aspects of the complex symbol producing process at different times.

As Wells (1986) suggests, such stylistic continua may be too simplistic, but, given current knowledge, they are a helpful heuristic for organizing and beginning to understand observed differences. For example, Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel, and Klausner (1985) illustrate that, in learning to read, some children may focus relatively more on keeping the message flowing smoothly, while others may be relatively more concerned about the accurate decoding of words. Of course many, if not most, children may fall between the extremes or vacillate between styles, depending upon the situation. There is not necessarily any difference in knowledge about written language between sylistically different learners--there is simply a difference in preferred ways of approaching the learning task. In time, children will attend in an integrated way to both demands.

In a previous study (Dyson, 1983, 1985), I examined individual differences in the writing of kindergarteners who were not yet working within the conventional (alphabetic) writing system. As the children worked in a classroom writing center, they each tended to set different tasks for themselves. For example, one child concentrated on making lists of her "names" (known labels for people and things); another explored a range of functions, including writing stories or correspondence, giving little attention to encoding (e.g., despite some knowledge of the alphabetic system, she used "teeny weeny" writing--tiny letter-like shapes--that "you can't read . . . but I can"); and a third child explored the encoding system, with little concern for any particular message. In general, the children engaged in the least sophisticated encoding (teeny weeny writing, wavy or "cursive" lines) when producing their most extended messages, and vice versa (for similar findings, see Sulzby, 1985).

In contrast, this article focuses on primary grade children who had a firmer grasp of the symbol system, including the relationship between speech and print, and who were

also conscious of the demands of the school writing task. That task was to produce an "illustrated story" to be read by their teacher and shared with their peers. The children, therefore, could not simply list words that they knew, nor could they explore the encoding system without a concern for a message or produce a message through encoding procedures they regarded as unintelligible by others (e.g. cursive lines or teeny weeny writing). That is, they were compelled by the task to attempt to coordinate the varied message forming and encoding demands.

Current Portraits of Beginning Writers

Descriptions of how young children, who have some understanding of the speech/print relationship, may orchestrate the written language system come from the pioneering work of Graves and colleagues Sowers and Calkins (Graves, 1983). While the researchers acknowledge the variation in children's writing, they have identified a general developmental pattern in children's writing processes. They describe beginning writers as initially planning their written messages primarily through drawing. The focus of children's first school writing efforts is encoding, with little conscious attention given to content. In their spelling, children are described as relying initially on phonological analysis of their speech, with visual memory playing a major role only later.

Certainly the general portrayal of children as increasingly reflective users of written language is compatible with all that we know about children as developing thinkers and as developing language users (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Vygotsky, 1962; Werner & Kaplan, 1963). Nonetheless, the complexity of the written language system, the documented individual differences in symbol use, and the existence of variation in the literacy environments in which children learn all point to the need to take a holistic and comparative look at individual children working in particular settings. That holistic look at differing children should lend insight into dimensions of variation that may exist in how beginning writers manage the complex composing--orchestrating--process.

The next section will illustrate children's differing approaches to composing by focusing on a small group of peers who have different intentions when writing "stories," who focus on different aspects of the writing system at different times during composing, and who lean on different sources of support within their ostensibly identical classroom writing context.

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM CHILDREN

The Classroom

The data reported in this section are drawn from an ongoing participant observation project in kindergarten and primary grade classrooms. The study site is a "magnet" school, which draws children from social and ethnic groups from across its urban community. The classrooms are heterogeneously formed, thus allowing diversity in academic achievement as well. The specific data of interest here were collected an average of twice per week in a combined first/second grade classroom from January through May 1985. There were 30 class members, 14 boys and 16 girls. Eleven of the children were Anglo, 10 were Black, 5 Hispanic, 1 Asian, and 3 of mixed ethnicity.

The journal activity

In this classroom, the language arts program centered around journals (a book composed of construction paper and alternating blank and lined paper). The children drew and wrote in their journals daily. During journal time, the teacher circulated among the children. She discussed their story ideas with them, and, while often encouraging children to attempt their own spelling, she did provide requested words in each child's personal dictionary. A teacher's assistant and, often, a parent volunteer were also available to answer the children's questions and monitor their behavior. The teacher allowed time for each child to "share" two or three entries from their completed journals (which consisted of approximately 13 stories) with the class.

In interacting with the children during both journal composing and sharing, the teacher praised productivity, that is, producing one picture/text set at least every two days. She also talked about the importance of legible stories that "made sense." Unusual word use, clever story lines, and colorful, engaging pictures were all publicly acknowledged. While the teacher did not expect the children to spell or punctuate their writing perfectly, she did "proofread" their stories for these mechanics and, as the year progressed, expected them to proofread as well.

While the teacher was only intermittently available to any individual child, the children had ongoing symbolic and social sources of support within this activity. Symbolically, the children could lean on drawing and on talking to help form and convey their ideas. Socially, they could lean on each other--they were free to ask each other questions and to comment on each other's work.

Collected data

In this classroom, then, I gathered holistic, descriptive data: audiotapes of the children's talk, their drawn and written products, written observations of their behavior. While data were gathered on all children, four first graders were chosen as case studies; selection was based on four critieria. Children were chosen who, first, were described by the classroom teacher as falling within the broad range of "normal" (i.e., judged to be neither emotionally disturbed nor intellectually retarded) and, second, were perceived by her as being differentially successful in language arts. The teacher's comments suggested that success was related to productiveness (i.e., the child's ability to regularly produce a drawing and at least three accompanying sentences) and carefulness (e.g., legibility, sensible sentences). Third, I noted children who seemed comfortable being observed by and talking with me. And fourth, because of the interest in stylistic differences among children, I selected children who, during the first two weeks of data collection, displayed different approaches to drawing, drawing being the first and most easily observed phase of the composing activity. (These drawing differences will be illustrated in a following section.) All children displayed some understanding of the precise nature of the speech/print relationship (e.g., all were able to identify at least some initial consonant sounds).

Based on the collected data, case studies were written that described consistent patterns in the children's composing behaviors (including behaviors during both the drawing and the writing phase of the journal activity), the intentions or goals that appeared to guide their efforts and, also, how those intentions were fulfilled through varied symbolic media (drawing, talking, and writing) and by interaction with others. (For more detailed information on data analysis and coding, see Dyson, 1986.)

This article focuses on the three children who were the most distinctly different: Jake, Manuel, and Mitzi. These children most clearly illustrate the dimensions of the composing activity within which variation may be seen. For each case study, I describe the nature of the child's behavior during the journal composing activity, including both the drawing and writing phases of this activity. Specifically, I detail when, how, and to what extent each child focused on the varied and intertwined message forming and encoding demands. In addition, I note each child's ways of leaning upon the available symbolic and social sources of support.

Jake: Telling and Drawing Tales for his Friends

Jake was of mixed Black/Anglo ethnicity. A talkative, sociable child, Jake often told stories about his out of school experiences and reacted with relevant comments and questions to the experiences shared by others.

Drawing: Focusing on a verbal story

Jake's intention during journal time appeared to be to create an imaginative adventure. His story evolved during drawing as he talked with his friends. During the five months of the study, he consistently drew and talked about the actions of powerful vehicles, especially jets, and adventurous men. At times, Jake seemed to be not only focused on the unfolding action, but also enjoying his own language, using with obvious pleasure--and, also, obvious concern for accuracy--unusual phrases, like "flying earthling" and "demonstration earthling holder." His raised voice suggested that he was performing with language for his peers; they laughed and, at times, entered into his story with him, leading Jake to elaborate and extend his plots. In this sense, his friends, as well as his own drawing and talk, served as support for his evolving story, as illustrated in the excerpts from the "flying earthling" event presented in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1
Excerpt From Drawing Phase of Jakes "Flying Earthling" Event

Talk During Drawing		*Comments*
Jake:	Now I'm gonna make a mechanical man.	
Mn:	A mechanical man? You mean a robot man?	Manuel (Mn) is Jake's peer.
Jake:	Yeah. I'm gonna make a robot man. You got it, Manuel.	
	. . .	(Three dots indicate omitted data.)
	Here's a bomb head.	The "mechanical/robot" man's head has two lines extending from it. (See Figure 2.)
	It's gonna explode. It hasn't even exploded yet. When it does--	
Mn:	I hope it explodes in the next century.	
	. . .	

(continued on next page)

Talk during Drawing		*Comments*
Jake:	Here comes the bomb explosion! There is the fire, a little smoke. . . . It's gonna explode in the next few days.	Jake is making quick back-and-forth motions with his marker.
Mn:	I hope it happens on the weekend and then I won't be around.	
Jake:	Not for long this school will be around. . . . I'm gonna make a flying earthling.	

FIGURE 2
Drawing Produced in Jake's "Flying Earthling" Event

Jake generally drew the major objects (e.g., the vehicles) carefully, using lines and swirls to represent actions. He included some background features. For the excerpted event, Jake's picture consisted of two figures, equipment attached to or close by the figures (e.g., "a demonstration earthling holder"), and background (sky, clouds, and ground). (See Figure 2.) While the drawing displayed relevant figures in an appropriate setting, it only hinted at the elaborate actions described through Jake's ongoing talk.

Writing: Focusing on encoding

During writing, Jake focused on encoding, rather than on the content of the message. Using both talk to self and with others, he encoded words and sought assistance with that encoding. Although he did discuss topics other than spelling, those topics were rarely associated with his written message. Jake's struggle with encoding is illustrated in the excerpt from the "flying earthling" event contained in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3
Excerpt From Writing Phase of Jake's "Flying Earthling" Event

Jake's Text	*Composing Code*	*Talk during Writing/Comment*
once	S	Jake copies *once* from his personal dictionary.
	OV	"Once a, a" . . . Jake turns to the *P* page in his personal dictionary, looking for "a pond."
pepperoni	OV	"P-E-P-P-E-R-O-N-I" (Jake is copying the wrong word.)
	RR	Text: Once pepperoni Jake: "Once a Once a pon a time Once a pon a Once a pon a" (Jake is rereading his text.)
	OV	"time"
	IS-P	(To Mitzi) "You don't know how to do times tables. Either does Jessica [Jess]." (These remarks may have been triggered by the word *time*.)
		Jess: I know. ("I know I don't know.")
		Mitzi: I do.
		Jake: I do. I do. I know what 5 x 5 is.

(continued on next page)

Jake's Text	*Composing Code*	*Talk during Writing/Comment*	
		Peer:	What?
		Jake:	5.
			. . .
			Man, that's wierd. 1 x 1 is 1.
	OV		"Once upon a time, time"
	IS-A		"I need *time*."

KEY: *Dialogue*: IS-P--Interruption Solicited from Peer; IS-A--Interruption Solicited from Adult; IU-P--Interruption Unsolicited from Peer; IU-A--Interruption Unsolicited from Adult. *Monologue*: OV--Overt Language; RR--Reread; PR--Proofread (make a change in text). *Other*: S--Silence; P--Pause; R--Resource use; DR-Drawing; ///////--Erasing (form adapted from Graves, 1973).

As the year progressed, Jake was able to independently spell an increasing number of frequently repeated words. He also attemped to "sound out" unknown words, most frequently coming up with the first letter and then calling out to the table for assistance. Nonetheless, he continued to reread or re-say his text repeatedly, as he progressed word-by-word through his story.

In order to hang on to his message through this demanding encoding process, Jake appeared to depend upon his drawing: in his words, "I copy offa the picture." Jake generally began his texts with "Once upon a time there was a . . ."(or some variation of this)--such an opening appeared in 10 of the 13 entries Jake wrote during the course of the study. But the "stories" themselves tended to describe the action in the picture, often vacillating between past and present tense; 11 of the 13 stories in fact described the picture. Thus, his dependence upon his static pictures, which were stuck in time, appeared to make his stories stuck in time. In the light of the talk accompanying Jake's drawing, his texts were starkly bare and static, stripped of the lively and imaginative spoken ideas.

For example, during the "flying earthling event," Jake wrote:

> Once upon a time there were two men. One man was flying up in to the clouds. The other man was staying on the ground. The and.

Jake was not unaware that his written stories were a paler version of the original ideas. Before beginning to write, he could recite the story he had in mind. But, when writing, "I always come to an exciting story and I--I--I want to quit it." To "quit it," he just makes "the conclusion . . . This is my conclusion. 'The end' is my conclusion."

Manuel: Creating Sensible Pictures and Stories

Manuel, an Hispanic male, was a slender child with a shy smile. He had an attentive, questioning, but respectful manner with both adults and peers. Manuel was a peace maker, occasionally offering comfort to children who were upset or compromises during disputes. However, he did demand that people be truthful and reasonable, as reflected in the anecdote opening this paper ("Don't you think you're overreacting?"). Manuel's journal entries centered on superheroes, thus presenting a contrast between the forceful larger-than-life figures and the quiet, polite, and very sensible little boy who produced them.

Drawing: Focusing on a visual design

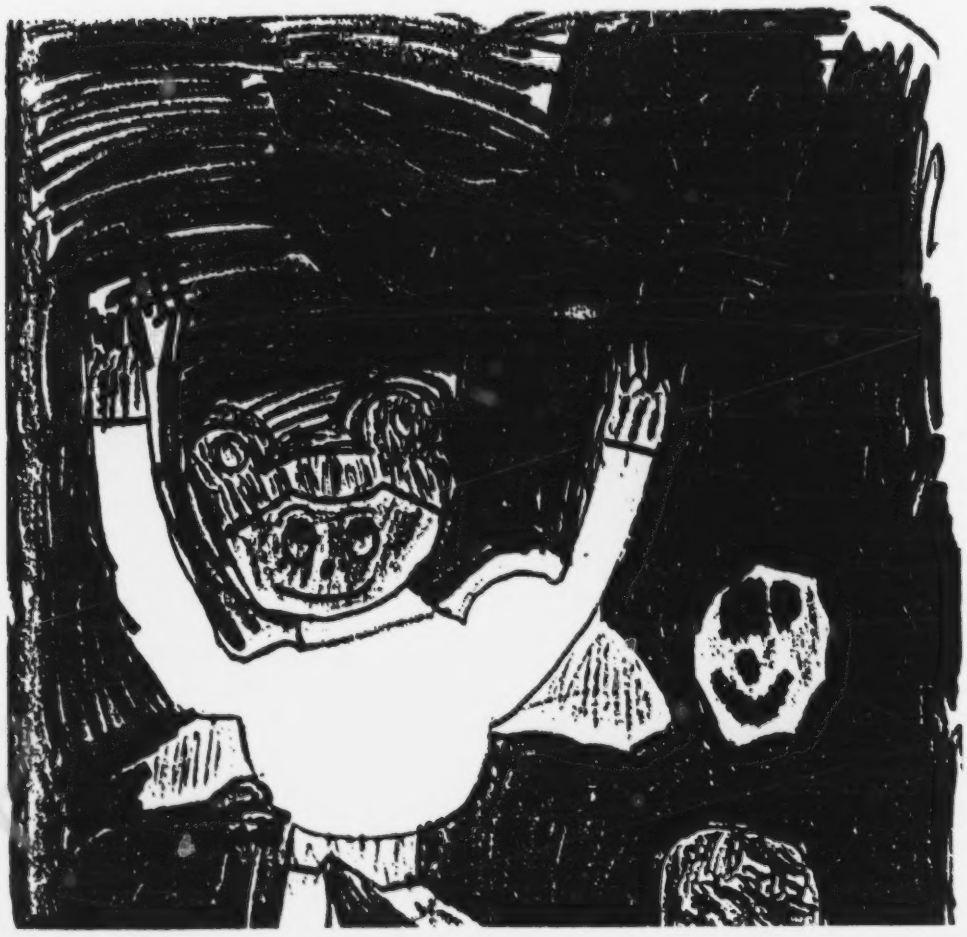
Manuel's intention during journal time, like Jake's, appeared to be to create an adventure story. However, unlike Jake, Manuel appeared to grapple with each picture and each story as a unique art form. During drawing, Manuel focused on the visual image he was creating, rather than a verbal message. Although he did enter into ongoing conversations with his peers, he was often silent for long stretches of time. He would occasionally comment on and reason about his efforts, and then the hard-working visual artist was evident, as illustrated in the excerpt in Figure 4 from the Mighty Mouse event.

FIGURE 4
Excerpts From Drawing Phase of Manuel's Mighty Mouse Event

Manuel's Talk During Drawing	*Comment*
I'm making Mighty Mouse. . . .	Manuel is beginning to draw. (See Figure 5.)
I think in a real earth there's more water than that. . . .	Manual is now focusing on his own efforts to make an earth in the background of his picture.
Forget the stars.	Manuel considers adding stars to his picture but decides against it, as they would not show up against his black "night."
If I make stars, I'm probably gonna have black. Oh, I can't have black either. It'll match this.	

In this event, Manuel produced a typically well-detailed drawing, displayed in Figure 5 (next page): a flying Mighty Mouse, complete with cape and bulging arm muscles, is set against a night sky; in the distance, so to speak, are the moon and the earth.

FIGURE 5
Drawing Produced in Manuel's Mighty Mouse Event



Writing: A dual focus

Unlike Jake, when Manuel began to write, he did not have an already formulated story. Thus, he had to plan his story while writing. To formulate his story, Manuel appeared to lean on his knowledge of the expected behaviors of his drawn characters: "I'm gonna write something about Superman and so on and so on." He occasionally talked about the whole story he was trying to create or a particular event he was grappling with. The event to be represented in text was clearly separate from the words to be written. He appeared to regularly make decisions about which words would make a good story (e.g., "I think that sounds good. A nice little adventure story."). Thus, while Jake had dwelled in his imaginary worlds, dramatizing them through talk with his friends, Manuel stayed outside the worlds he was creating, tinkering with words as he had tinkered with color and line. His friends served as audience, but not as direct collaborators in his evolving story. Manuel's reflectiveness is illustrated in the excerpt in Figure 6 (next page) from the Mighty Mouse event.

FIGURE 6
Excerpt #1 From Writing Phase of Manuel's Mighty Mouse Event

Manuel's Text	*Composing Code*	*Talk During Writing/Comment*
Once upon a time Mighty Mouse was on a secret mission to find a bad guy.		
	OV	"I'm gonna write, 'When something happened.'
		"I don't know what to say."
. . .		After a lengthy pause and a long unrelated conversation with his peers, Manuel writes:
Mighty Mouse was flying when he felt something		
	IU-A	At my query, Manuel explains, "Well, he felt something shooting him, but 'he felt like trouble' is what I'm going to write."
	OV	"Got to get some action in here."
		With much effort, as will be illustrated, Manuel writes a differently worded text that nonetheless captures his expressed idea:
that did not feel good		

KEY: IU-A--Interruption Unsolicited from Adult. OV--Overt Language.

As can be seen from this excerpt, Manuel's planning efforts slowed his writing process. He worked to make reasonable, sensible choices about his written story. In one particularly revealing event, Manuel had written:

> Once upon a time there was a mad scientist that made a monster. that monster killed to people that won

Manuel was concerned about the logic of this story. He commented:

> How about "won the race"? Maybe they [the victims] could have been famous because they won lots of races.

So Manuel added "a race" (note the switch from the more definite *the* to *a*), satisfied that there was some narrative sense in his tale: The monster killed two people that were very famous, and, apparently, the monster would therefore have had reason to attend to them.

Although Manuel appeared to focus primarily on his evolving story, the encoding of the text also took much effort. Like Jake, Manuel used talk to monitor the production of each phrase, to reread in order to figure out the next word to be spelled, and to actually spell that word. Spelling and rereading appeared to cause Manuel even more problems than they did the other case study children. Manuel consistently relied on others for spelling help and, gradually, on his own visual recall of frequently written words. Phonological analysis was problematic for him--he grappled with the whole process of matching voice and print. His encoding difficulties are illustrated in the second excerpt, presented in Figure 7, from the Mighty Mouse event.

FIGURE 7
Excerpt #2 From Writing Phase of Manuel's Mighty Mouse Event

Manuel's Text	*Composing Code*	*Talk During Writing/Comment*
		Manuel has written:
Once upon a time Mighty mouse was on a secret mission to find a bad guy. mighty mouse was flying when he felt something that		
	RR	"Once upon a time, Mighty Mouse was on a secret mission, a secret mission to find a bad guy. Mighty Mouse was flying uh when he felt something." (Manuel has not been able to accurately match voice and print; he relies on memory to help him with this process.)
		Manuel has decided that the next word to be written is "that," although *that* is in fact already on his paper:
	OV	"that, that, that, that, that, that, T-H"
	IS-A	(to me) "Is it T-H?
		I think I've got two same words"
		Dyson: No, you've got *that*.
		Manuel: OK. That <u>that</u>'s over here, but I think I need *that* again. That. No, wait. I don't get this.
		Manuel then rereads and, realizing that the word that begins with T-H must be the sole needed *that*, he writes the next word, *did*.

KEY: IS-A--Interruption Solicited from Adult; OV--Overt Language; RR--Reread.

Of the ten texts Manuel produced during the course of this study, six were narratives--in his words, "adventure stories"; that is, they involved present or accomplished movement through time. Six also had some variant of a "Once upon a time" opening. In the excerpted event, Manuel's final text was:

> Once upon a time Mighty mouse was on a secret mission to find a bad guy. mighty mouse was flying when He felt something that did not feel good all of The sudden a ship came out of a clearing. The ship exploded.

While Jake captured motorsensory qualities (e.g., speed, volume, emotional tone) in his talk during drawing, Manuel captured them in his written words. Note, for example, the phrases, "He felt something that did not feel good" and "all of the sudden."

Manuel, then, alternated during the writing phase of the composing event between a focus on the evolving verbal message and a focus on encoding that message. Both his drawing and his writing process were slow, a fact noted by his teacher, his peers, and Manuel himself. When his peers remarked that he was "still" working on his Mighty Mouse story two weeks later, Manuel commented, "Haven't you ever seen a slowpoke before?"

During the last month of the study, Manuel changed his style notably, producing three entries quite quickly; each took only two days. Manuel appeared to accomplish this change by, in fact, doing what Jake did--"copying offa the picture."

Manuel's decision to change styles may have been influenced by a discussion he had with his peer, Molik. Manuel had drawn a picture of Superman and then written a story about Superman giving him a lollipop. Molik commented:

> Molik: He wouldn't really do that.
>
> Manuel: Maybe I should've made him with a lollipop.

Manuel's next text was a description in present tense of his picture:

> The Frankeinmonster is killing a girl But the girl is squeezing the franmaonster nose.

As Manuel said, "I writed that [points to the picture]. See?"

Whatever the reason for the change, Manuel was very pleased with the speed the style change allowed: "OK. God. That was only 2 days too!" Writing a description of a picture with action in it was quicker and easier than painstakingly constructing a "nice little adventure story."

Mitzi: Talking and Writing about Relationships

Mitzi, an Anglo female, was a tall, thin child with a low voice and a straightforward manner. Mitzi's talk centered around her family and a circle of close girlfriends. She usually sat by one of her friends, particularly Bessie or Sonia. She and her friends helped each other, Mitzi often spelling words for other children, while they offered her colors or "the best pencil." As will be illustrated below, as a composer,

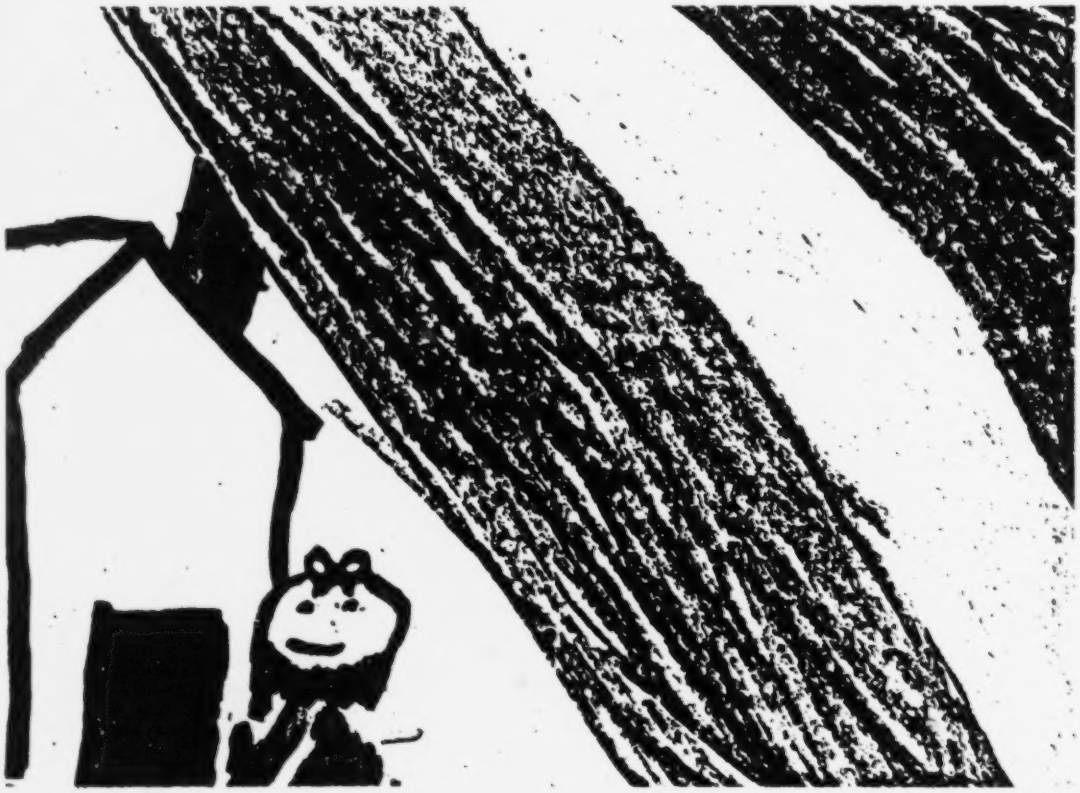
Mitzi was both similar to and different from the two boys. Like Manuel, she did not make great use of drawing as symbolic support for her story; but, like Jake, she was supported as a composer by her ongoing social relationships with her peers.

Drawing: Focusing on a visual design

Mitzi did not consistently draw before writing. While her writing and her drawing were related, her drawing did not determine the nature of her written message, as Jake's did. Nor did a written text determine exactly what would be drawn.

Mitzi's primary intention during journal time appeared to be to produce a journal entry as efficiently as possible, an entry that reflected her feelings about people. She did not focus extensively on her verbal message during drawing or writing. During drawing, Mitzi typically drew pictures of females, most often little girls, against a background. Like Manuel, and unlike Jake, she typically concentrated on her design. For example, she worked to produce elaborate three- dimensional houses and, late in the year, a house with transparent walls that revealed carefully arranged rooms. She also experimented with different ways of using drawing instruments; for example, on several occasions, she manipulated several markers at once, producing a "fireworks" effect.

FIGURE 8
Drawing Produced in Mitzi's "Girl Under the Rainbow" Event



While Mitzi did not tell stories during drawing as Jake did, she did intermittently talk with her peers. Her talk, though, did not appear to be related to her ongoing drawing. She talked about families and friends and about qualities of those families and friends. For example, while drawing a little girl (see Figure 8), Mitzi carried on several extensive discussions with her friends; following are excerpts from two topics, one about "fat," the other about her upcoming birthday party.

The children have been discussing "fatness" and whether or not everyone is a "little bit chubby", as Sonia claims.

Mitzi: You don't know about people, Sonia. Cause you ain't a people--you ain't a person.

Jake: You're a person, not a people. You're not a people. You're a person. (Note Jake's concern with language.) Mitzi and Sonia laugh.

Mitzi: You're a people (accusing Sonia).

Sonia: No, I'm not, Mitzi (defensively).

Jake: Yes, you are (seriously).

Sonia: (to Mitzi) You don't know. If you were that skinny you would die.

Sonia and Mitzi now begin discussing Mitzi's upcoming birthday party, which will be a slumber party.

Sonia: Where am I going to sleep?

Mitzi: Me and Bessie are gonna sleep up on the top [of the bunk bed].

Sonia: Oh. Who's gonna sleep on the bottom? Your brother. Where am I gonna sleep, Mitzi?

Mitzi: You're gonna sleep in my sleeping bag.

Jake: I knew that was going to come up. Sleeping bag.

Mitzi: Or maybe sleep with my brother [who is 2]. He is cute.

Sonia: He's cute, and I like to squeeze babies too.

Writing: Focusing on encoding

During writing, Mitzi worked quickly, and, like Jake, she appeared to concentrate on encoding. She silently wrote familiar words, stopped often to reread her text, and occasionally requested the spellings of words. Mitzi's spelling requests were, however, notably fewer than her peers', and, further, she often volunteered spellings in response

to their requests. Mitzi's writing process may have been less laborious than Jake's in part because her texts were more repetitive. Mitzi, in fact, produced more journal entries during the course of the study than did the other case study children (Mitzi produced 23, Jake--13, Manuel--10).

Mitzi's texts typically began with a "Once there was" opening. Mitzi's opening served to label an object in her picture, often a female, a house, or a landscape feature, such as a rainbow or a tree; that line was followed by a statement, in present tense, of how she or "you" like, hate, might like, or might be liked by the object or figure; and finally came a "the end." Of the 23 products produced during the course of the study, 17 contain "love" or "like." In the event described above Mitzi wrote:

> Oncwe there was a girl. She might like You. She liveds under a Rainbow. I LIke You. The End.

Thus, while Jake focused on creating a verbal story during drawing, and Manuel focused on his verbal message during writing, Mitzi did not appear to need such attention to a verbal message, given the repetitive nature of her texts.

But, while Mitzi's texts were no doubt made less arduous to produce by her "I like" pattern, this pattern was not simply a text of convenience. As already noted, it was one of the central themes of Mitzi's interactions with her peers. In this way, then, Mitzi's entries, like Jake's, were supported by her social interactions with her peers.

To further illustrate, recall that, as Mitzi drew the little girl under the rainbow, she and Sonia had been discussing Mitzi's birthday party. Immediately after that discussion, Mitzi quickly wrote her next piece:

> I like Sally. And I like Sonia too. And I like Bessie. And I like Elizabeth P. And I like Sarah. The End

The girls named are those invited to the birthday party. Sonia herself did not dismiss the significance of this text:

Sonia: Mitzi, you love me.

Mitzi: I said *like*, not *I love*.

MAKING SENSE OF VARIABLITIY

Similarities and Differences in Composing Behavior

This close examination of Jake, Manuel, and Mitzi has illustrated differences in young children's ways of composing--of orchestrating the written language system. To begin to make sense of the documented variability, let us first review the specific similarities and differences between the children. Jake, Mitzi, and Manuel had been in school together for two years. They had had the same kindergarten teacher, who was now their first grade language arts teacher. They participated in ostensibly the same activities, with the same materials, in the same school. And, indeed, there were similarities as well in their ways of using the varied structural units of written language (e.g., discourse, sentence, phrase, word, sound).

Like most young children, their messages were not yet organized into conventional text structures, an ability that develops gradually over the elementary school years (Bartlett, 1981). They worked hard to match oral and written phrases and sentences (Clay, 1979); grammatical morphemes (articles, endings) posed particular problems (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982). When attempting their own spellings, they relied at least in part on a phonological analysis of speech (Read, 1975). However, when one looks closely at the children's ways of orchestrating the writing activity, different approaches to written language become clear.

Throughout the story of each child's behaviors as learner and as writer, then, there were suggestions of the children's search for order--for sensible structures. But the children did not necessarily attend to the same aspects of written language nor did they attend to those aspects at the same temporal point in the composing activity (see Table 1). The children's composing behaviors were consistent with their apparent intentions and their work styles, including their ways of leaning upon other symbolic tools and upon their peers.

TABLE 1
Summary of Differences in Children's Ways of Orchestrating Writing

	Dominant Focus		Major Writing Strategies	
Child	*Drawing phase*	*Writing phase*	*Composing Message*	*Encoding Message*
Jake	Composing verbal message	Encoding	Describing picture	Visual recall
				Requesting words
				Phonological analysis
Mitzi	Designing picture	Encoding	Using repetitive patterns	Visual recall
				Phonological analysis
				Requesting words
Manuel	Designing picture	Composing verbal message	Reflectively organizing and wording story	Requesting words
				Visual recall
		Encoding		

NOTE: The order in which encoding strategies are listed is only a rough indication of frequency of use.

Individuality as an organizing force

As in the studies of symbol development reviewed earlier, the case study children differed in how they made use of drawing, talking, and writing. The similarity between the stylistic differences documented here and those in other reports serves to link these three cases to those of many other children; these linkages suggest that the nature of the reported differences is not unusual, despite the fact that they have not been previously reported in the literature on beginning writing (McCutcheon, 1981).

The currently described differences seem best captured by the terminology of Bussis and colleagues (1985), perhaps because of their focus on primary grade literacy (specifically, reading). They describe one group of their observed children as tending to display broad, integrative work and play styles, as they produced exploratory, personalized meanings. In contrast, other children were more oriented to methodical and linear styles, as they worked to carefully reproduce experienced meaning structures. Jake, Manuel, and Mitzi revealed these stylistic differences in the degree to which they set firm boundaries between activities--including boundaries between different symbolic activities and between their own and others' activities--in creating their stories.

Both Jake and Manual intended to write exciting adventures. However, Jake's style as a symbolizer and as a socializer in the classroom allowed him to create an adventure during the drawing phase of the journal activity. Through his talk, he propelled his story forward in time, turning his drawn picture into a motion picture (for an elaboration of such a style, see Dyson, 1986). Moreover he performed these adventures for his peers, who both acknowledged and helped extend his story. During writing, his major task was to encode the already formulated story, after the necessary "Once upon a time" opening.

Like Jake, Manuel intended to create adventures. However, his style was quite different. The boundaries between drawing and writing, between his own activity and those of his peers, were quite set. Thus, he produced visually complex pictures, working to make them as realistic as possible. However, in most events, his picture provided only minimum support for developing his story, as Manuel did not "tell" his story during drawing: As he said during the second grade year, "I don't write about my pictures. I just write stories." Manuel deliberately planned his written story, choosing words with the care with which he had chosen colors and strokes for his drawing.

Mitzi seems to fall between Jake and Manuel in boundary-making. Like Manuel, she did not use talk to create stories during drawing. Thus, drawing seemed to provide her too with little support beyond a topic. Mitzi did not, though, make narrative demands upon herself, opting for the simpler strategy of putting forth a topic and commenting on it, making use of familiar sentence patterns (cf. Sowers, 1979; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1982). Like Jake, however, Mitzi's texts reflected her ongoing talk with her friends and, in particular, her concerns about relationships.

Thus, for all three children, differences in boundary setting--between drawing, talking, and writing and between their own activity and that of their peers--made sensible the strategic differences in their ways of composing. The children had different styles--their writing was supported by different symbolic and social processes--and thus their ways of beginning to manage the complexity of writing differed.

Differences between Children's Behavior and Adult Expectations

The teacher's expectations

As the classroom teacher read the children's products, she noted the length, organization, and "sense" of each story--she expected at least three related sentences; she considered how many days the child had spent producing the journal entry; she noted the care with which the picture was drawn and colored; and she examined the mechanics--handwriting, spelling, punctuation. On the basis of such examinations, the children's teacher, like most teachers, drew conclusions about the child's skill as a writer. And, while regularly expressing her own enjoyment of all the children's efforts, she also, like most teachers, had concerns about their progress.

Of the three children, the classroom teacher was most concerned about Manuel, as he was having difficulty spelling and, in addition, was so very slow in finishing his work. On occasion she expressed concern about the degree to which Jake concentrated on his work, as he talked so much during writing time. She expressed the least concern to me about Mitzi, commenting only when Mitzi began drawing by using many markers simultaneously, which seemed unthoughtful scribbling.

When the children's products and behaviors are put within the context of their ways of orchestrating the writing system, they appear more sensible, less problematic. Jake was talkative, and his talk was certainly not always task-related. Nonetheless, his sociality was a basic part of his work style and, as such, provided support for formulating his stories. In addition, his written stories did not adequately reflect his sense of narrative nor his facility with language.

Manuel was slow--but his slowness, like Jake's talkativeness, was a reflection of his style. For most of the data collection period, he was not willing to simplify his stories by "copying offa the picture" or by using repetitive sentences. Thus, he set for himself a demanding, time-consuming task. Manuel did have great difficulty with the orthographic system, perhaps because his attention was drawn to a larger unit of order--the story.

Mitzi was productive. Her pictures were usually orderly; they reflected, as did her "scribbling," her concentration on visual design. Her texts, while not conventional stories, were sensible, particularly if one was looking for at least three related ideas. Her reliance on repetitive patterns eased the writing task and supported her productivity.

The purpose of this article is to describe differences in young children's ways of orchestrating writing, rather than to document changes in their writing over time, which would entail another paper. However, I would like to note that one year later, in the second grade, with the same classroom teacher and the same class structure, the children's styles were still evident; all the children, though, had improved in both the structure of their narratives and in their independent encoding--including Manuel, who remarked to me, "I used to ask for every word, but now I don't." The following writing samples from their second grade year illustrate their progress:

Jake continued to create action-filled adventures during journal time, but now the adventures were in his text, rather than only in the talk accompanying his drawing:

> Once there was a boy that is named Manuel. Manuel is going to fly the fastest jet and I am going to fly the jet too. But Manuel's headquarters is

going to blow up. But I am OK. But I don't know about Manuel but I am going to find Manuel. But when I find him I like him. But I think I see him. He is in the jet. Manuel are you OK? Yes I am OK. you are being attacked. I will shoot the bad guys out of the universe. OK Yes shoot them now. The end.

Manuel's ability to paint with words continued to grow. The following is just part of a long story Manuel was writing:

One day I was walking down a lonely road. The sun's light glimmered on the new fallen snow. I fell in to a deep trance because of the beauty. Soon I lost track of the time.

Mitzi continued her concern with relationships, but now she wrote about real or imagined experiences with family and friends, who could also like or hate:

I had a dream and my dream Was a Big Nightmare. and this is my Nightmare. Once there was a Girl and her name was Jenni* and she hated me. But I do not know why. and she had a magic bulb. Her bulb was a very Powerful bulb. It was so powerful it turned Me into a Powerful bulb and now she has two Powerful blubs. The one that is Me is even powerfuller than the other one. The End.

(*Jenni is Mitzi's most consistent playmate this year.)

Researchers' expectations

As noted earlier, the most notable descriptions of children orchestrating the writing process have come from the Graves (1983) case study project. The currently reported cases were similar to those cases in that all the children clearly focused to some extent on encoding--it was not an automatic process. However, the cases differed, both from the Graves' cases and from each other, in the aspect of written language that the children focused on and in when they focused on that aspect. More specifically, drawing did not necessarily contribute extensively to the development of the written message; encoding did not necessarily dominate during writing; phonological analysis was not necessarily the dominant encoding strategy.

These differences in portraits of young writers may be partially attributable to differences in the research settings; the Graves project occurred in a suburban school, the currently reported project in an urban school. Certainly more variability in students' experience and thus knowledge about writing may be assumed to exist in the more ethnically and socially diverse urban student population; however, there is no indication in this project nor in other studies of literacy development that any of the described stylistic tendencies are limited to children of particular social or ethnic backgrounds (see Bussis et al., 1985).

In addition to differences in the communities served by the schools, there were differences in classroom demands. For example, the first graders in the Graves project were, as I understand it, expected to--as opposed to encouraged or allowed to--invent their own spellings. Ability to compose was defined as dependent upon such spelling: "Children are able to compose when they know about six consonants" (Graves, 1983, p. 184).

In the classroom observed in the currently reported project, children did rely on phonological analysis of speech to varying degrees, but they also requested words from

each other and available adults and relied on visual recall of frequently written words. If classroom demands for message creating or encoding had been different, the observed children's composing strategies may have been different.

Any case study is a description of an intentional being in interaction with a particular environment. That is the strength of the case. However, that strength can become a limitation without adequate comparison of case study children from different backgrounds, with different styles of working, and in different instructional situations. For one builds knowledge from cases through just such comparative work, as one searches for patterns and dimensions of variability in whatever the phenomenon is of interest. This report, then, has aimed to contribute to that needed work.

Implications for Teacher Assessment

The need to assess the progress of young children is an inescapable fact of classroom life. Not only is assessment necessary for the periodic evaluative summaries teachers provide administrators and parents, it is necessary for the daily instruction teachers provide children. The major instructional strategy now recommended to early childhood teachers is accepting and guiding children's writing efforts through comments and questions; certainly teachers cannot do this unless they observe and make judgements about children's intentions and strategies.

In observing young writers, our framework should be, I believe, not a narrow line--not even a jagged line allowing for forwards and backwards movement--but a set of complex mutually influential sets: written language, the child, the specific setting or settings of interest. The case studies presented in this report suggest that, as a result of those complex sets, children beginning to orchestrate the written language system may differ in the extent to which they focus on the varied demands of the writing activity and in when they maintain that focus. These differences may exist, in part, because of differences in the ways in which children make use of the available sources of support, some children tending toward crossing social and symbolic "boundaries" to engage in messy, collaborative exploring, others toward setting careful boundaries to ensure careful, methodical constructing.

In this project I have not explored the effect of various instructional strategies on children's composing. Yet, the presented argument for the existence of variablity in young composers' orchestration of writing suggests that our notions of how to help young writers be flexible. I am not sure, for example, what would have happened if Jake had been moved away from his peers so that he could "concentrate," if Manuel had been required rather than encouraged to "sound'em out," if Mitzi had been told to incorporate the parts of a good story.

While any experienced teacher knows that some children have difficulty learning to write, we cannot distinguish developmental "problems" from the "solutions" children develop for beginning to manage a complex system, until our understanding of those solutions--our documentation of "normal" behaviors--is sufficiently broad and flexible. For if we are too rigid in what we expect from children of varied age and grade levels or in what we conceive of as "good writing," we risk cutting children "off from the seat of their best judgement" (Bussis et al, 1985, p. 196). We do not want to "overreact," in Manuel's words, when a child fails to meet our expectations but, rather, by looking at that whole child working with a complex whole tool, we want to see the sense--the music--of each young composer.

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